

Received date: 15-06-2023 | Accepted Date: 18-06-2023 | Published Date: 16-10-2023

Compelling factors limiting veterinary health and animal management services in rural Kenya

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Statement of Problem: Subsistence livestock farming is a common economic endeavour in a number of countries in Africa. Such farmers maintain one or two cows for milk production and use in the homestead, few goats for occasional slaughter specifically during celebrations or weddings and some poultry particularly when guests visit the home depending on family labour force. The farmers are knowledgeable about the day-to-day care of such animals. However, they are severely limited in animal health knowledge. Additionally, Eeswaran et al 2022 working in Senegal describe challenges that are similar to Kenya in terms of availability of sustainable good quality feed, low supply of potable water, weak breeding and management programmes and climate change besides lack or poor livestock marketing strategies. Pasture is rain fed and therefore largely seasonal. Above all subsistence livestock farmers in Kenya as elsewhere in Africa experience enormous socioeconomic handicaps. Veterinary and animal management services are dependent on private providers who have no option but to include cost of transport, consumable supplies time and professional expertise. Extensive field experience suggests that whereas smallholder livestock farmers play substantial role in the overall national food security and the economy they are underdeveloped and underserved with essential veterinary clinical and animal management services. In this context, although these farmers are in the majority distributed all over the country, the small holders deserve recognition and provision of veterinary health and animal management services. One among many suggestions is to seek ways and means to support locally available private professionals some of whom tread long distances on foot to ensure the farmers access technical advice and services on regular basis which they least afford.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to create awareness of the plight of smallholder livestock farmers who form the bulk of producers of milk, meat and eggs and by-products from grass and local grain fed animals in rural Kenya. The farmers contribute immensely to nutrition of young children and old people and ensure livelihoods and food security and above all to families' incomes and the national economy. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2019) argued that there is insufficient data to quantify livestock outputs and their values in Kenya. This suggests that opportunities for robust research exist to determine populations of various species of domestic animals and their production and economic impacts; for example, Wekesa et al 2017 reported that there has been a decline in livestock production for market over a period of time among some communities in Kilifi County. Emphasis within these communities is livestock farming for household consumption. Although they argue that climate change has contributed to the decline reduction in veterinary health and animal management extension services ought to be considered. The Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) states that among the constraints of livestock production are inadequate extension and advisory services, disease complications and high cost of inputs.

Methodology and Theoretical Orientation: Study sites: Counties of Kiambu in Central Kenya, Kilifi in Coastal Region, Machakos in Eastern Region and Vihiga in West Kenya. See map of Kenya below.

Observational study was conducted in the four study sites. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at each site.

Findings: Over 80% of smallholder livestock farmers are women 60 years and older ($n = 24$). Majority maintain free ranging local breeds of chicken, sheep and goats ranging between 2 and 6 in number and varied low numbers of cows but generally a single exotic dairy cow for milk production for domestic consumption and for sale to generate income. Almost all the women are illiterate or semi-literate. They heavily rely on hands-on experience in managing the livestock; exhibiting an amazing recall memory on animal disease outbreaks and solutions that led to resolution of the problem. Besides, lack of or low level of education unpredictable rain seasons impact heavily on livestock production. Climate change has compelled some of the farmers to abandon maintaining livestock and move to planting crops



Map of Kenya showing international boundaries and the Counties including study sites.

Recent Publications:

1. Eeswan, R., Nejadhahemi, A. P., Faye, A., Min, D., Prasad, P. V. V and Ciampiti, I. A. 2022. Current and future challenges and opportunities for livestock farming in West Africa: Perspectives from the case of Senegal. *Agronomy*, 12(8), 1818; <https://doi.org/10.3390/agronomy12018188>
2. Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Organization (KALRO) 2023
3. Livestock and Livelihoods Spotlight Cattle and Poultry in Kenya: In Africa Sustainable Livestock 2050 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2019
4. Malenje, E. M., Missohou, A., Tebug, S. F., Konig, E. Z., Jung'a, J. O., Bett, R. C., and Marshall, K. 2022. Economic analysis of smallholder dairy cattle enterprises in Senegal, *Trop Anim Health Prod* 54(4); 221; doi: 10.1007/s11250-022-03201-y
5. Wekesa, C., Ongugo, P., Ndalilo, L., Amur, A., Mwalewa, A., and Swiderska, K. 2017. Smallholder farming systems in coastal Kenya: Key trends and innovations for resilience. IIED Country Report, IIED, London, ISBN 978-1-78431-529-0.

Biography

Mbaruk Suleiman attained PhD in Comparative Medicine at Uppsala University, Sweden in 1998. He has extensive and intensive research and field work exposure to wildlife and domestic animal subsector. He began his career in preventive animal health activities a number of decades ago, changed focus into laboratory based research with specific attention to zoonoses and later opted to impart knowledge to undergraduate and postgraduate students at Mount Kenya University, Main Campus, Thika, Kenya. Currently he is mentoring five PhD and six Masters Candidates (national (Kenyans) and foreign) from varied Universities. Earlier he successfully guided fifteen postgraduate students.

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